

Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Vocatives as rationalized politeness: Theoretical insights from emerging norms in call centre service encounters

Journal Item

How to cite:

Hultgren, Anna Kristina (2017). Vocatives as rationalized politeness: Theoretical insights from emerging norms in call centre service encounters. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21(1) pp. 90–111.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2017 John Wiley Sons Ltd



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Version: Accepted Manuscript

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:
<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1111/josl.12224>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk

Vocatives as rationalized politeness:
Theoretical insights from emerging norms in
call centre service encounters¹

Anna Kristina Hultgren
The Open University

United Kingdom

Author's accepted manuscript.

Published version available from the [Journal of Sociolinguistics](#).

Hultgren, Anna Kristina. 2017. Vocatives as rationalized politeness: Theoretical insights from emerging norms in call centre service encounters. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 21(1): 90-111.

Abstract

This study offers an extension of existing politeness theories by illuminating how changes in politeness conventions come about as a result of contextual specificities. Despite a surge in mediated service encounters, few studies to date have considered the linguistic enactment of politeness in call centres, mainly due to restrictions on access. Drawing on a linguistic ethnography of an onshore call centre in Scotland and data in the form of authentic service interactions, interviews, on-site observations, and institutional documents, the study combines quantitative and qualitative discourse analytic techniques to explore how the call centre-specific tension between efficiency and customer care is managed in theory and practice. It is found that while the institution accords equal importance to efficiency and customer care, in actual service interactions, agents prioritize efficiency. Furthermore, in the few cases where agents do orient to customer care, vocatives appear to be used as a shortcut; documenting the emergence of a novel – rationalized – type of politeness. The study contributes the theoretical insight that new politeness conventions emerge, not so much because of the imposition of one culture on another, but because they are shaped by the particular context in which they arise.

该研究扩展了现有的礼貌用语理论,我们详细阐释了特殊情境下是如何改变礼貌用语习惯的。虽然在当代社会,通过媒介(电话)提供服务的形式大量涌现,但是主要由于数据权限的限制,迄今为止很少有人研究呼叫中心的礼貌用语的语言设定。利用语言学和社会人类学的方法,我们从一个苏格兰国内的呼叫中心收集了真实的呼叫服务对话互动录音,并进行了实地观察和访谈,也阅读了相关的机构文件。本研究结合定量分析和定性话语分析的方法,来研究在理论上和实践中,人们是如何处理该呼叫中心的效率与客户体验之间的矛盾。我们发现虽然理论上该呼叫中心把效率与客户体验放在同等重要的位置,但在实际电话服务对话中,工作人员更注重效率。而且,在少数情况下,当工作人员注重客户体验时,称呼客户的姓或名字似乎是一个捷径,这体现了一种新的而又合乎常理的礼貌用语。该研究为礼貌用语理论贡献了新的见解:新的礼貌用语习惯的出现源于它所在的特定语言环境,而不只是一种文化强加在另一种文化的结果。[Chinese]

Keywords: call centres, politeness, service encounters, vocatives, rationalized politeness, linguistic ethnography, synthetic personalization, McDonaldization

Short running title: Vocatives as rationalized politeness

INTRODUCTION: FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO TECHNOLOGY-MEDIATED SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

In 1976, Marilyn Merritt, pioneer researcher of the language of service encounters, defined a service encounter as ‘an instance of face-to-face interaction between a server who is “officially posted” in some service area and a customer who is present in that service area, that interaction being oriented to the satisfaction of the customer’s presumed desire for some service and the server’s obligation to provide that service’ (1976: 321). Forty years later, most of this definition still applies, though with one significant exception: the interaction between the customer and the service worker is no longer exclusively or even primarily ‘face-to-face’ but ‘mediated’ in some way, whether by telephone, email, chat or something else (Félix-Brasdefer 2015; Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya 2015). As a result, the ‘officially posted server’ and the ‘customer’ are by default no longer ‘present’, in a physical sense, in the same ‘service area’.

This reconfigured – mediated – nature of service encounters raises a whole new set of questions about the enactment of service encounters in contemporary society (Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya 2015). In call centres specifically, one of the most salient aspects of the mediation is arguably the hyper-rationalized nature of the institution, enabled and reinforced by improved global infra-structures, plummeting costs of data transfer and political and economic deregulation (Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe 2007). Inspired by the works of Max Weber, the American sociologist George Ritzer sees rationalization as a key aspect of contemporary society. Using the metaphor ‘McDonalization’, he sees rationalization as ‘the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world’ (2013: 1). To Ritzer, rationalization is based on maximising four

principles, *efficiency*, *calculability*, *predictability* and *control*, each of which also underlies call centre work (Cameron 2000).

Efficiency in call centres relates to maximising the output with the least amount of time, cost and effort. Calls are drip-fed to agents through an Automatic Call Distributor and the ultimate aim is to have no idle agents at any one time. Calls are under durational constraints as a one-second fall in call time per agent in a UK call centre has been estimated to save a business two million pounds in a year (Miozzo and Ramirez 2003). The service interaction is often designed top-down by superordinate agents, scripted or standardized, and encoded in documents to make sure that time is not wasted on talk that unnecessarily prolongs the interaction (Cameron 2008). *Calculability* is manifested in the abundance of quantified targets that exist for virtually all aspects of call centre work (Taylor et al. 2002). Agents are typically measured on 'hard targets', such as duration and volume of calls and how quickly calls are answered. They are also scored on 'soft targets', which relate to the extent to which they come across as professional, polite and friendly in their interaction with the customer. *Predictability* refers to minimising variation between calls and is manifested in the aforementioned top-down design of the interaction. In the main, predictability is a means to efficiency, but as Cameron (2000) observes, it is also often presented as a virtue in itself in that it serves to create the impression of a coherent brand identity. *Control*, finally, is exemplified by the unprecedented reliance of call centres on technology to direct, monitor and control work practices, something which has seen them described as 'regimes' (Cameron 2000) or 'electronic panoptic[a]' in which supervisory power has been 'rendered perfect' (Ferne and Metcalf 1998).

While the *raison d'être* of call centres is clearly rationalization, there is acute awareness in call centres that this needs to be counter-balanced with providing excellent customer care. The most common type of training in European call centres, accounting for 43% of total training time, is training in 'soft skills', i.e. customer service (Durbin 2006). These more interpersonal aspects of the interaction are subject to similar rationalization processes and metrics in the sense that they are prescribed from above, monitored and enforced in monthly call assessments (Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe 2007; Cameron 2008; Hultgren 2011). They can be seen as a form of 'synthetic personalization'; a way of compensating for the depersonalized nature of the interaction (Fairclough 1989). Thus, like face-to-face service encounters, call centre service encounters contain both 'transactional' and 'interactional' talk, the former relating to the transaction *per se* and the latter to 'non-obligatory talk that is embedded in transactional or task-oriented talk, such as phatic exchanges or small talk' (Félix-Brasdefer 2015: 1-13).² Because of the highly pressurised nature of call centre work, striking a balance between transactional and interactional talk is arguably an even greater challenge in call centres than in face-to-face service encounters. The tension is well documented and captured in the description of call centre work as 'customer-oriented bureaucracy' (Korczynski 2001), and of agents as being 'like a pig in the middle' between providing customer care and meeting the company's targets (Alferoff and Knights 2002: 196).

This study considers the ways in which the, in principle, equally important ideals of efficiency and customer care are managed in actual call centre service interactions. This is a timely project given that research into call centre and other mediated service encounters is lagging far behind their prevalence in contemporary society (Hernández-López and Fernández-Amaya 2015). Where sociolinguists have studied call centre service interactions,

the focus has not usually been on politeness (see, however, Hultgren 2011; Archer and Jagodziński 2015; Márquez Reiter 2011) but on issues like gender (Cameron 2000; Heller 2007; Forey 2013) and standardization and commodification (Woydack and Rampton 2015; Heller 2010; Duchêne 2009). As sites characterized by extensive bi- and multilingualism, call centres have also shed light on key sociolinguistic issues, e.g., national identity, accent neutralization and language shift (Kahlin and Tykesson 2016; Cowie 2007; Alarcón and Heyman 2013). Conversation analysts have typically drawn on call centre interactions to demonstrate the bottom-up co-construction of the social order (Baker, Emmison and Firth 2005) while applied linguists have tended to look at offshore call centres and the use of English as a second or foreign language (Bolton 2010; Forey and Lockwood 2010; Friginal 2009).

Drawing on data in the form of authentic call centre service encounters combined with other ethnographic data, this study adds a new perspective to our understanding of how politeness is enacted in a highly rationalized, little-researched yet increasingly widespread type of service encounter: call centre telephone talk. Because of commercial sensitivities and data protection acts, studies of authentic service interactions are few and far between (Cowie 2007; Cameron 2000) and most of the studies cited above have had to resort to analysis of interviews, institutional documents, observations of work practices and mock calls. However, given that 69.8% of an agent's workday is spent in interaction with customers (Dimension Data 2015), a key aspect of call centre work – the linguistic interaction with the customer – has therefore been obscured from such accounts. Moreover, the majority of studies have been conducted in off-shore call centres where agents and customers either have different first languages or are located in different national cultures, which raises additional issues, not least in relation to politeness (Márquez

Reiter 2011; Mirchandani 2005; Salonga 2010). Despite onshore call centres constituting approximately two-thirds of the world's call centres (Holman, Batt and Holtgrewe 2007), they are among the least researched. Thus, the present study seeks to add a new perspective on politeness by considering a call centre where English is the first language of the interactants.

INTERACTIONAL AND TRANSACTIONAL POLITENESS

In this section, I set out how politeness is conceptualized in this study and how this differs and shares points in common with current theorizations of politeness.

'Politeness' in this paper is understood in a broad sense as the 'interpersonal' or 'relational' aspects of talk (Locher and Graham 2010); or what Spencer-Oatey refers to as 'rapport management', i.e. the 'management of social relations' (2008: 12). It is noteworthy that call centre actors themselves tend to use the term 'rapport', e.g. when emphasizing the importance of 'building rapport' with the customer; a lay usage which does not (necessarily) have anything in common with the theoretical framework. However, call centre service encounters also have the distinct purpose of service encounters in general, which is that of 'demanding and giving goods & services' (Ventola 1987: 115). For this reason, it has proved useful to make a distinction between 'transactional' and 'interactional' talk as being oriented, respectively, to business content and social relations (Brown and Yule 1983), despite criticisms levelled at the distinction.

The most notable way in which politeness in call centres differs from most other accounts of politeness is that it is imposed from above by super-ordinate agents who do not

participate in the interaction (Cameron 2008). In a way, the pre-defined nature of politeness in call centres reverts back to an earlier era of politeness research in which politeness was seen as residing a priori in linguistic forms (Brown and Levinson 1987) rather than as emerging in social practice, as more recent theoretical developments would posit (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). The reorientation from system to practice has meant paying greater attention also to the hearers' interpretation of politeness rather than solely to the speakers' intentions (Haugh 2014). While the hearers' interpretation of politeness is beyond the scope of this study, we will consider both the call centre-prescribed politeness and that which is enacted in actual interactions, and as we shall see, there is some mismatch between the two.

Given current theorizations of politeness as emerging in practice, it follows that what constitutes politeness is never fixed but variable in time and space (Eelen 2001; Mills 2003; Watts 2003). To capture this dynamic nature of politeness, a distinction can be made between 'unmarked' and 'marked' politeness (Terkourafi 2008). Unmarked politeness normally goes 'unnoticed' and includes such high-frequency expressions as 'please' and 'thank you'. Marked politeness, in contrast, occurs when 'the expression used is not conventionalized relative to the context of occurrence' (Terkourafi 2008: 70). As I shall argue, since call centres are still relatively novel institutions where politeness norms are only just beginning to become 'conventionalized', there are instances of 'marked' politeness which have the potential to 'offend the ears', such as vocatives. 'Vocatives', used interchangeably with 'naming' are understood here as directly addressing a customer by their name, whether this is their first name or title and last name.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC METHODS

This study relies on a linguistic ethnography conducted in a large, inhouse, inbound, onshore call centre in Scotland. The call centre, named 'Thistle Insurance', is part of a large insurance company and deals primarily with queries relating to pensions. Its customers include business and private customers.

In order to understand both the call centres' and the agents' policies and practices, both prescriptive data and data on actual language use was collected. Prescriptive data consists of 80 pages of documentary data, comprising call assessment scorecards, customer service manuals, course material, monitor sheets, agent performance reports, internal memos, etc. It also consists of 11 days of on-site observations of work practices and the call centre environment, including listening into calls, attending communication training and observing call assessments. Data on actual language use comprises a corpus of 79 authentic call centre service interactions taken by 26 agents (16 female, 10 male) with a total duration of 3 hours and 43 minutes. Calls in Thistle are recorded as part of standard operating procedures and callers are informed of this. Half of the calls in the corpus were randomly selected, taking every 1 in 10 calls in the same time period, and transcribed by the author. They last between one and five minutes. The other half was collected by a gatekeeper, and transcribed by the company. Finally, interviews, which shed light on both prescribed and actual politeness, were conducted with 20 agents (11 female, 9 male) and 3 managers (1 female, 2 male). These lasted a total of 6 hours and 50 minutes. For all data collection, the University of Oxford's ethics guidelines were adhered to. All calls are anonymized.

To understand the institutional priorities, linguistic prescriptions were extracted from documentary, observational and interview data, yielding a total of 21 rules which were

analysed qualitatively in terms of their primary meaning (transactional or interactional) (see Table 1). Transcripts of authentic customer service interactions were analysed by scoring agents on a binary categorical division according to whether or not they complied with a linguistic prescription in question. Compliance was quantified. The quantitative coding of compliance was supplemented by a qualitative approach as it soon became clear that not all rules could reasonably be expected to be adhered to in every call. In these cases, the call was not counted for that particular rule. This happened in three cases:

1. The type of the call

Some rules only apply in certain types of calls. For instance, the rule to inform the customer that they were being put on hold, can only reasonably be expected to be adhered to if the customer is being put on hold in the call in question.

2. Conversational constraints

The compliance with some rules is sometimes constrained by the interlocutor's preceding utterance. For instance, agents in Thistle are meant to acknowledge the customer's problem by explicitly reassuring them that they can help, but if the customer phrases their query as a question, it would be bizarre for the agent not to respond to that question directly, which is, in effect, breaking the rule.

3. Incomplete transcripts

Insufficiently detailed transcripts occasionally precluded an accurate assessment as to whether a rule was complied with. This was particularly the case for the call-centre transcribed transcripts. This happened only in very few calls.

The basis for the analysis of compliance only includes those cases where it was deemed that a rule could reasonably have been adhered to, but wasn't. Contextual data in the form of onsite observations and interviews inform the analysis but is not analysed in full in this study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Ideal: Striking a Balance between Transactional and Interactional Talk

In this section, I consider the balance between transactional and interactional talk as advocated by the institution in order to compare this, in the next section, with how this balance plays out in practice in authentic customer service interactions.

TABLE 1 HERE

Table 1 lists all linguistic rules prescribed in Thistle Insurance (Column 2) along with, where necessary, a more detailed description and some examples of what the rule entails (Column 3). The rules are distinguished depending on whether their primary meaning is interactional or transactional. However, as has often been pointed out, the distinction between transactional and interactional meaning is not always easy to make and sometimes the two meanings co-occur. The acknowledgement rule, for instance, which requires agents to explicitly acknowledge the caller's problem before starting to resolve it, may be seen as interactional in that it reassures the customer that their query has been correctly understood, yet it is equally plausible to analyse it as transactional in that it relates to the query itself having been correctly understood. Similarly, 'signposting', 'summary before

solution', 'check understanding' and 'summary' are metadiscursive comments serving the dual purpose of attending to the customer and making sure that the transaction stays on track. However, they are arguably more transactionally oriented than some of the more prototypically interactional talk as 'verbal handshake', 'name' and 'small talk', so they have been analysed here as transactional.

Furthermore, requiring agents to state their name by giving a 'verbal handshake' may be seen as transactional in the sense that it offers the caller a named point of contact in case there is a need to call back on the same matter; however, in practice it is not possible to ask to speak to the same agent again as calls are always distributed randomly to agents. Similarly, while eliciting the caller's name may be thought to have the transactional function of identifying the customer on the system, the only way of uniquely identifying customers is through their customer number. Transactionally, then, it would be entirely possible to conduct the interaction without reference to either the caller's or the agent's name, which speaks in favour of analysing naming as interactional strategies. The greeting too deserves a special mention as it might seem counterintuitive to classify it as transactional. However, the reason for this is that, as the only rule, the company specifies that it must be reproduced verbatim as prescribed, i.e. 'Good morning/good afternoon, Thistle Insurance, how may I help you' on the grounds that the company should be presented under a coherent brand identity. Thus, it seems more company- than customer oriented and for this reason it has been classified as transactional.

The prescriptions advocating transactional and interactional aspects are roughly equal in proportion, 11 and 10 respectively (see Table 1). From an institutional perspective, then, agents should ideally be as attuned to the interactional as they are to the

transactional level of talk. This equal importance of transactional and interactional content is backed up by other data. In interviews, agents told me that they were expected to create rapport with customers by picking up on things they'd said and engage them in small talk. A female agent relayed that if a customer called in to notify of a change of address, the agent should ideally treat this as an opportunity to engage in small talk by saying 'Oh, a new house?! Are you moving anywhere nice?'. Another female agent told me that if they heard a baby cry in the background, they'd be expected to engage in conversation about that. Similarly, in call assessments, a male call centre agent was commended for 'chatting up' a female customer. At the same time, however, agents are also rewarded for controlling and taking charge of the calls efficiently by making good use of 'I-statements' (e.g. 'I can certainly help you with that', 'I will make sure to get that done for you, Mr/Mrs Customer' (Customer service manual, Thistle)). Revealingly, a coach also said that although agents were expected to finish every call with 'Is there anything else I can help you with?', she added that the best scenario was that the customer said 'no' so the call could be brought to a conclusion. Another telling example of the tension between customer care and efficiency is a handwritten note on a monitor sheet upon which a coach has written: 'Great reduction in handling time this month – keep up the good work!'. The monitoring sheet belonged to an agent who was known for regularly exceeding targets for call duration in order to, by his own admission, 'put a personal touch' on the interaction. In theory, then, the call centre seems to attribute roughly equal importance to transactional and interactional talk. In the next section, we will have a look at the extent to which this balance is upheld in actual customer service interactions.

Actual Service Encounters: The Prioritization of Transactional Talk

Comparing the extent to which rules are adhered to with the extent to which they *could have been adhered to* (that is, where there are no constraints of the three types mentioned in the methodology section that precluded their presence), a very highly statistically significant difference emerges ($\chi^2(1, N = 1049) = 64.30, p < 0.0001$). Overall, then, while there is greater potential for interactional rules to be complied with, in practice they are complied with to a lesser extent. Percentage-wise, interactional rules are complied with only 39% of the time, whereas transactional rules are complied with 64% of the time. What this suggests is that, in practice, transactional meaning takes precedence over interactional meaning and that the reason for this is not that interactional rules *cannot* be complied with because of conversational constraints; rather they seem to be deliberately avoided by the agents. One possible explanation for this is the heavy emphasis on targets, efficiency and speedy call processing. In the next section, we will focus in more depth on the interactional rules in order to understand how politeness is managed in practice and, in particular, if different types of politeness are preferred to others.

Marked and Unmarked Politeness

Following Terkourafi (2008), the interactional talk identified in this study can be analysed as either 'marked' or 'unmarked'. Unmarked politeness is listed to the left in Figure 1 and includes saying 'thanks and please' and using minimal responses to signal 'active listening'.³ As unmarked politeness is, by definition, unremarkable, it will not be considered further in this paper. Marked politeness, on the other hand, is that which would be unusual or remarkable in face-to-face service encounters, and which is therefore potentially revealing

in terms of changes in politeness conventions. These strategies are shown in the right side of Figure 1, and we will consider these in more depth in this section and the next. In most short face-to-face service encounters it would, I suggest, be unusual for a service worker to elicit and use a customer's name, to introduce themselves and to engage in small talk unless they know each other well. Certainly, when such strategies are employed in face-to-face interactions, for instance when Starbucks workers ask customers for their name so they can write it on a cup, it is likely to be noticed.⁴ As argued in this paper, however, they are a hallmark of call centre service encounters, and so the degree to which they should be considered marked or unmarked in this particular context is open to discussion.

What is notable is that the marked politeness that takes place in call centre service encounters appears to be affected by the intensely rationalized nature of the institution. Thus, as can be seen in Figure 1, compliance with marked politeness varies depending on what precisely is being prescribed. 'Small talk', 'empathy' and 'personal endnote' (finishing the call with a phatic phrase, e.g. 'have a nice day') are not complied with to any great extent, whereas 'naming' (using the customer's name) and 'verbal handshake' (eliciting the customer's name and stating one's own) are complied with more often. In the case of empathy, the low compliance is partly attributable to there not being a great deal of potential for this prescription to be complied with, in that it would require the caller to express some sort of predicament with which it would be appropriate for the agent to empathize. If potential for compliance is controlled for, the figures are 60% and 52% compliance for the 'naming' and 'verbal handshake' prescriptions compared to only 7%, 16% and 4% for 'small talk', 'empathy' and 'personal endnote'; a clear difference in other words. Below, we will have a more detailed look at why more precisely agents may favour the 'naming' and the 'verbal handshake' rule rather than 'small talk', 'empathy' and

‘personal endnote’ to create rapport. I will argue that this choice can be analysed as a form of *rationalized politeness* in that vocatives are a more efficient way of creating rapport with customers, enabling agents to simulate a personalized service without compromising the equally important ideal to process calls efficiently.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Rationalizing Politeness: Naming as a Shortcut to Customer Care

Before having a look at a call in which vocatives are used as rationalized politeness, it is illuminating to first have a look at one of the very few calls in the corpus where an agent engages in small talk with the customer. The call involves an independent financial adviser calling Thistle Insurance on behalf of a customer in regard to a pensions divorce case. The caller has sent the paperwork for the case to the wrong department on a couple of occasions and now calls Thistle to make sure that it gets through to the right place. Occurrences of ‘small talk’ and ‘personal endnote’ are highlighted in bold.

Example 1: Small talk and the prolongation of calls

1. Agent Good morning Thistle Insurance Group. How may I help you?
2. Caller Good morning. My name is Andrew Simpson and I am calling from TIFC Consulting.
3. Agent Hi there.

4. Caller Hi. I've got a P1 form to send up to yourselves in regard to a pensions divorce case.
5. Agent Oh right okay.
6. Caller I just want to we've sort of sent it in to the wrong place on the wrong form a few times. I just want to clarify exactly who I need to send it to what the address is and where I can actually fax it up initially to get it going quicker.
7. Agent Certainly Mr. Simpson. Let me help you there. My name is Stewart Robertson so that you know who you are talking with just now.
8. Caller Okay.
9. Agent Do you have a policy number or plan number that relates?
[Caller states policy number.]
10. Agent That's lovely. I'll just go quiet for a few seconds and I'll get the policy details up on the screen and that'll tell me exactly where you need to send that.
11. Caller Okay brilliant.
12. Agent **How are you doing today yourself are you okay?**
13. Caller **I'm very well pleased it's Friday. Yourself?**
14. Agent **Phase B that's all I'm going to say.**
15. Caller **What's the weather like up in Scotland?**
16. Agent **It's lovely actually.**
17. Caller **Lucky you.**
18. Agent **A sunny day.**

19. Caller **It was blue sky it's gone a bit overcast from the little inch of sky I can see from my desk.**
20. Agent **Through the cell window.**
21. Caller **Yeah exactly.**
22. Agent **Hopefully it's going to be a nice weekend. I've got my fingers and toes crossed.**
23. Caller **It's supposed to be a heatwave. Woohoo!**
24. Agent There's the details beginning to appear and you're actually through to the right place here. So would you like as a very quick security check for the tape what's the first line and postcode of your address?

[Security check performed.]
25. Agent These are assigned company pension policies. So if you simply quote that policy number 123. The address to send it to is the Milhouse address. Do you have that? Milhouse in Perth?
26. Caller Let me just have a look. Yes Milhouse Perth PH7 8BT.
27. Agent That's it. That's the address to use. But in the meantime what you can do is fax it to myself. So my name is Stewart Robertson. [Agent gives fax details.]
28. Agent That's it Mr Simpson. I'll get the case started [inaudible] posted.
29. Caller Okay brilliant. Well thank you very much Stewart.
30. Agent No trouble at all. My pleasure.
31. Caller I'll fire that out. Also when I send it to you who will I send it up who will I put it to the attention of then?

32. Agent Just again put my name on it. There's no problem with that at all and I'll be able to farm that onto the correct area.
33. Caller Okay thanks a lot Stewart. Cheers!
34. Agent Thanks for your call **enjoy your day**. Bye bye now.
35. Caller Bye.

Turns 12–23 in this call contain small talk initiated by the agent. Asked by the agent how he is keeping in turn 12, the customer replies and this leads to a series of phatic exchanges about the weather which stretch over no less than 11 turns. While it is the agent who initiates the small talk, possibly as a result of filling the pause while searching for the information needed, the caller plays along and keeps the conversation going. Thus, one possible reason why small talk features so rarely in the corpus may be that in using it, agents open up the potential for further exchanges which they are then unable to cut short without coming across as abrasive. Possibly, the 'enjoy your day' expressed in Turn 34 is a result of the earlier small talk since a certain familiarity has already been created. Such extensive small talk is welcome from the point of view of building rapport with the customer, but less than ideal from the point of view of keeping the call under control and bringing it to a timely conclusion. As we shall see in the next call, there is a way in which both these ideals can be oriented to at one and the same time, and that is by using the customer's name as a speedy and rationalized way of providing a personalized service. The caller is another independent financial adviser calling to get a retirement quotation for one of his clients. Instances in which the agent uses the caller's name are in bold.

Example 2: Vocatives as rationalized politeness

1. Agent Good afternoon Thistle Insurance Group. How may I help you?
2. Caller Hello I'm Chris Thorne from Abicus.
3. Agent Hi **Chris**.
4. Caller To do with an EPP.
5. Agent Yeah. Do have your scheme number?
6. Caller Yeah ABC456.
7. Agent You're speaking to Alex Freeman.
8. Caller Hi Alex.
9. Agent I'm just bringing up the details up on front of me **Chris**.
10. Caller That's Arizon Limited.
11. Agent What company is it you're calling from please **Chris**?
12. Caller I'm calling from Abicus now I'd entered authority here with this case. I had dealt with this one all along but you have got authority from Summit which was the previous IFA which is closed. Right?
13. Agent Right.
14. Caller So I know you can't talk to me about it.
15. Agent Yeah.
16. Caller Can you send the client a retirement quotation please from the 1st September. The client being James Sunderland not Michael Smith.
17. Agent Yeah I can get that sent out to your [company name].
18. Caller Great.
19. Agent Em. Just retiring on 1st September?

20. Caller Yes I think he is. I've seen him on Tuesday and he's asked me to gather all the information on all his funds and I've just realised that this one I can't talk to you about it other than just ask you to send a quotation out.
21. Agent Yeah. Not a problem. Can I have your telephone number **Chris**?
22. Caller Mine? I'll give you my mobile 'cos that's the easiest. 07342 943 109.
- You've probably seen the name on the file 'cos I was dealing with I've always dealt with this case.
23. Agent Yeah. Em right okay I can arrange to get that done for you.
24. Caller And that will be sent out to Arizon?
25. Agent Yes.
26. Caller That's brilliant!
27. Agent Okay **Chris**.
28. Caller Okay. Many thanks.
29. Agent Not a problem. Thank you.
30. Caller Alright. Bye bye.

In this call, the agent uses the callers first name 'Chris' on five occasions: in Turns 3, 9, 11, 21 and 27. The function is clearly interactional in that there is no transactional-related reason for the agent to use the customer's name. One possible interpretation of the agent's inclination to use the customer's name is that it serves the purpose of building rapport while not jeopardizing call duration targets by inviting the customer to engage in potentially call-prolonging pleasantries. In other words, by using vocatives, the agent is able to keep the call under control while also giving an impression of personalized customer service, thereby

catering at one and the same time for the ideal of efficiency and the ideal of customer care. Vocatives in call centres, then, may work as a *rationalized* type of politeness.

So far, we have considered ‘naming’ and ‘small talk’ and suggested that naming may be preferred over small talk as a way of keeping the call on track. But how about the other types of marked politeness which, like ‘small talk’ are not complied with to any great extent? These include ‘verbal handshake’, ‘welcome to call back’, ‘thanks for calling’, ‘anything else’, ‘empathy’ and ‘personal endnote’. With regard to the ‘personal endnote’, offered in Example 1, Turn 34, this cannot be said to be call-prolonging in that it does not in the same way as small talk invite the caller to engage in conversation. However, it may be that the reason why it, along with empathy, occurs so rarely in the corpus is that the prescriptions specify that these need to be tailored to the specific customer (see Table 1), something which also applies to ‘small talk’. This requires cognitive processing time on behalf of the agent, which may be at odds with the routinized nature of the interaction and therefore contribute to the overall avoidance of this type of politeness. Possibly, by trying to recall whatever the customer has said that a ‘personal endnote’ and ‘empathy’ could be pinned up on, the agent would get out of the ‘flow’ of processing calls quickly. In contrast to this, the naming rule is much easier to automate as the agent has the customer’s name readily available in front of them on the screen. In terms of the remaining four interactional prescriptions: ‘verbal handshake’, ‘welcome to call back’, ‘thanks for calling’ and ‘anything else’, these are one-liners and do not invite the customer in potentially call-prolonging exchanges. They serve the purpose of creating some sort of illusion of personal care and could therefore be suitable candidates for building rapport with the customer. However, as can be seen in Figure 1, they are not complied with anywhere near as frequently as the ‘naming rule’. This may be because they are not as personal as those strategies which are

individually tailored to the customer, i.e. 'naming', 'small talk', 'empathy' and 'personal endnote', all of which require some sort of response or adaptation to the caller's specific characteristics or situation. What accounts for the substantially higher compliance with the 'naming' rule, then, may be that it is the one strategy that enables agents to adhere at one and the same time to the personalization and the rationalization ideal that are expected in the interaction.

A particularly revealing piece of evidence in support of the interpretation that naming is used as a rationalized form of politeness comes from the Thistle scorecard, which is a three-page document listing a set of criteria against which agents are assessed in monthly call assessments. Under the heading 'people-focused' there is a sub-heading 'empathy/builds rapport' which lists as the following 'indicators' of a successful call:

There needs to be obvious signs of rapport built into [the] call by saying or doing something which is not ordinarily in business call, e.g.

- Ask how the caller is at the start of call
- Enquire about the weather
- Pick up on special events
- Seize the opportunity to make conversation
- Where there is no obvious opportunity then you must give your name and use caller name a minimum of twice during the call.

(Call assessment scorecard, Thistle)

The last bullet point reveals that naming is deliberately drawn on as a strategy to compensate for the lack of personalization that might have been achieved otherwise and puts into context the agents' clear preference for naming as a personalization strategy. However, I did not come across any managers or coaches sanctioning the use of vocatives as a legitimate compensation for other types of rapport-building strategies.

Before considering the significance of these findings, two things are worth mentioning: First, the five-times naming that was exemplified in 2 is relatively high compared to the corpus as a whole, but not unusual either. In the 44 calls where naming was used, it was used a total of 99 times, to varying degrees in each call. Secondly, while first naming of the type exemplified in 2 is by far the most common type of naming used, agents also address the customer by their last name and, occasionally, male customers with 'sir'. The distribution of first and last name and 'sir' is, respectively, 69, 27 and 3. It may be that agents in certain contexts perceive of first naming as overly familiar and instead opt for using last naming and 'sir' as a way of mitigating this, while still complying with the 'naming' rule.

SIGNIFICANCE: CONTEXTUAL CONDITIONING ACCOUNTS FOR CHANGES IN POLITENESS

The findings suggest that while the call centre accords roughly equal importance to interactional and transactional talk, in actual customer service interactions, agents prioritize the transactional aspects of the talk. Distinguishing between marked and unmarked politeness, it was also found that certain types of marked politeness occurred more

frequently than others. The speedily executed vocatives were complied with more frequently, presumably as a way of satisfying both the ideal of providing a personalized customer care while also meeting the company's efficiency targets.

On the basis of these findings, it is argued that the specific conditions of call centres are such that they pave the way for a novel rationalized type of politeness to emerge. This is a slightly different take on how politeness conventions change. It emphasizes, not so much the influence of norms from a dominant culture, usually America, on another, but the emergence of new social, technological and economic conditions which affect all cultures, English-dominant ones too. Thus, where some scholars report on views that American politeness conventions characterized by informality and camaraderie are influencing British, Greek, Polish and Hungarian culture (Sifianou 2013; Ogiermann and Suszczyńska 2011), others have pointed to the novelty of these norms in America as well, suggesting that America too is 'becoming an increasingly conventionalized-camaraderie society' (Lakoff 2005: 34). To Lakoff (2005), these new informal politeness conventions are epitomized in telemarketers engaged in cold calling and addressing their potential customers by their first name, a trend that seems to derive directly from call centres. The US and the UK are themselves affected by a surge in hyper-rationalized, mediated service encounters which are increasingly commonplace alongside face-to-face encounters. Thus, the key impetus for this novel and rationalized type of politeness is arguably better understood as having to do with the emergence of call centres and their peculiarities rather than with the imposition of one culture upon others (Sifianou 2013; Cameron 2007).

The findings that have emerged from this specific call centre - that interactional conventions may emerge from the material conditions constraining interaction can usefully

be understood in relation to other studies documenting global similarities in the work processes themselves. A review of research reports considerable similarities in call centres as far apart as Israel, Italy, Greece, France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Australia, the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, US, Canada, Colombia, Japan and India in terms of technology reliance, work processes and staff profiles (Hultgren 2008). Many call centres share a common pool of labour (Belt et al. 2000); indeed, a lot of the agents interviewed for this study had worked in several call centres, and reported little variation between them. Alignment across borders and vertical markets is perpetuated by international benchmarks by which call centres monitor how they stack up against the competition (Bain and Taylor 2000). The call centre industry defines itself as a community; there are industry journals and a steadily growing number of national and international conferences and workshops (Belt et al. 2000). There is considerable justification, then, to conceive of call centres as deriving from one single operational prototype, centred on Taylorism and rationalization, and with many more unifying than differentiating traits. In terms of politeness norms per se, Hultgren (2011) has found that the rapport-building strategies prescribed to call centre agents in such different locations as Britain, Denmark, Hong Kong and the Philippines, are strikingly similar, all encouraging agents to use the customer's name, small talk and display active listening, irrespective of whether such conventions are customary in the specific locality. There is also evidence of an international network of trainers and of communication material being circulated globally (Hultgren 2011), something which may also influence the type of politeness prescribed.

That political and economic factors - in this case, the making of profit via centralized, mediated, taylorized communication in the form of call centres – can influence politeness norms has been suggested in other studies. The growing prevalence of hitherto unknown

expressions such as 'Can I help you?', 'Thank you for shopping with us, come visit us again' in Russia, for instance, has been said to be brought about by the implementation of the free market economy (Rathmayr 2008). Ogiermann and Suszczyńska (2011), similarly, found that a new kind of politeness arose in Poland and Hungary with the fall of the iron curtain. Whereas before, public officials were known to be impolite, the greater supply of goods and competition that came when the free market replaced the communist regime, led to them becoming more polite as they now had to compete to keep both the customer and their job.

It is sometimes suggested that current socio-cultural, technological and politico-economic shifts have led to an 'informalization' of discourse, at least in media discourse (Fairclough 1995). In the particular case of call centres, many of the marked politeness strategies, such as 'small talk', 'personal endnote', 'welcome to call back', etc. could certainly be interpreted as attempts to 'informalize' the relationship with the customer. However, we also saw that there was variation in the extent to which these 'informalization' strategies were actually used by agents, with vocatives being by far the preferred choice. This suggests that 'informalization' only partly explains the change in politeness conventions in call centres. It has been argued that the specificities of the call centre, and in particularly the intensely rationalized environment, drive vocatives to be preferred over other types of informality markers. Compared to other types of politeness strategies, which risk either prolonging the call by ceding conversational control to the customer, require too much cognitive effort on the part of the agent, or are simply disliked, vocatives appear to serve as an efficient and convenient shortcut to customer care, enabling agents to reconcile the conflicting demands of efficiency and personalization. Further research could usefully explore whether the preference for vocatives as a shortcut to politeness is specific only to call centres or whether it applies elsewhere as well.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on data from an onshore call centre in Scotland, this study has argued, and presented evidence, for the emergence of a novel – *rationalized* – type of politeness in call centre service encounters. Faced with the conflicting requirements of providing a personalized service and processing calls quickly, agents appear to resolve this tension by resorting to vocatives: using the customers' name. It was suggested that this novel type of politeness was brought about by the extraordinarily rationalized environment that characterizes call centres. Awaiting confirmation by future studies, it was hypothesized that politeness conventions, and by extension, conventions for language use, may change, not so much because of the influence of one culture upon another, but because they are shaped by the specific social, technological and economic conditions in which they take place.

Arguably, the use of hitherto rarely accessed data in the form of authentic call centre service encounters from one particular onshore call centre, in which the environment is fairly extreme in terms of rationalization and regimentation, has enabled this insight to be made. Given the theoretical insight that politeness conventions may be shaped by the material contingencies in which they occur, this also means that they are forever malleable and susceptible to the emergence of new contextual contingencies. Thus, it will be interesting to see whether the rationalized type of politeness which has been documented here as 'novel' is already beginning to feel 'unremarkable', albeit still 'annoying' to some customers (Cameron 2008: 144). Perhaps, as service provisions continually evolve, 'complaints of bizarreness [will] come to be directed at newer targets, like the experience of being ordered about by a talking self-operated supermarket checkout' (Cameron 2008: 144).

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank the editors and the two anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Sociolinguistics* for their constructive comments. Financial support from the Danish Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation is gratefully acknowledged as is the time and participation of the staff at Thistle Insurance

² Félix-Brasdefer (2015) uses the term 'relational' rather than 'interactional'. Both terms have been much discussed in politeness research (e.g. Locher and Graham 2010) and will be clarified in a later section.

³ While the literature has found the meaning of minimal responses to be multifaceted, in a call centre context, it appears to be construed primarily as an interactional strategy, see the examples under Active listening (rule 17) in the Thistle Customer service manual in Table 1.

⁴ In contrast to what is the case in call centres, the naming in Starbucks has mainly a transactional purpose, i.e. to distinguish drinks orders from one another, whereas in call centres it is predominantly interactional. In fact, as a testament to this, I can report that the first time a (male) Starbucks service worker asked for my name, I mistook its transactional function for an interactional one, thinking that he was flirting with me, until I realized, quite embarrassed, that he just wanted to make sure I got the right coffee.

REFERENCES

- Alarcón, Amado and Josiah McC. Heyman. 2013. Bilingual call centers at the US-Mexico border: Location and linguistic markers of exploitability. *Language in Society* 42: 1-22.
- Alferoff, Catrina and David Knights. 2002. Quality time and the 'beautiful call'. In Ursula Holtgrewe, Christian Kerst and Karen Shire (eds.) *Re-Organising Service Work: Call Centres in Germany and Britain*. Aldershot: Ashgate: 183-203.
- Archer, Dawn and Piotr Jagodziński. 2015. Call centre interaction: A case of sanctioned face attack? *Journal of Pragmatics* 76: 46-66.
- Bain, Peter and Phil Taylor. 2000. Entrapped by the 'Electronic Panopticon'? Worker Resistance in the Call Centre. *New Technology, Work, and Employment* 15(1): 2-18.
- Baker, Carolyn D., Michael Emmison and Alan Firth (eds.). 2005. *Calling for Help: Language and Social Interaction on Telephone Helplines*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Belt, Vicky, Randal Richardson and Juliet Webster. 2000. Women's Work in the Information Economy: The Case of Telephone Call Centres. *Information, Communication and Society* 3(3): 366-385.
- Bolton, Kingsley. 2010. 'Thank you for calling': Asian Englishes and 'native-like' performance in Asian call centres. In Andy Kirkpatrick (ed.) *The Routledge Handbook of World Englishes*. London: Routledge. 550-64.
- Brown, Gillian and George Yule. 1983. *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Brown, Penelope and Stephen C. Levinson. 1987. *Some Universals in Language Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cameron, Deborah. 2000. Styling the worker: Gender and the commodification of language in the globalized service economy. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 4(3): 323-347.
- Cameron, Deborah. 2007. Redefining rudeness. In Mina Gorji (ed.) *Rude Britannia*. London: Routledge. 127-138.
- Cameron, Deborah. 2008. Talk from the top down. *Language and Communication* 28(2): 143-155.
- Cowie, Claire. 2007. The accents of outsourcing: the meanings of 'neutral' in the Indian call centre industry. *World Englishes* 26(3): 316-330.
- Duchêne, Alexandre. 2009. Marketing, management and performance: multilingualism as commodity in a tourism call centre. *Language Policy* 8(1): 27-50.
- Durbin, Sue. 2006. Gender, skills and careers in UK call centres. In Julia Connell and John Burgess (eds.) *Developments in the Call Centre Industry: Analysis, Changes and Challenges*. London: Routledge. 117-135.
- Dimension Data. 2015. *Global Contact Centre Benchmark Comparison Portal*. Accessed via <http://www.ccma.org.uk/benchmarking/benchmarking-reports/> (10 March 2016).
- Eelen, Gino. 2001. *A Critique of Politeness Theory*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1989. *Language and Power*. London: Longman
- Fairclough, Norman. 1995. *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.

- Félix-Brasdefer, J. César. 2015. *The Language of Service Encounters: A Pragmatic-Discursive Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fernie, Sue and David Metcalf. 1998. *(Not) Hanging on the Telephone: Payment Systems in the New Sweatshops* [discussion paper no. 390]. Centre for Economic Performance: London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Friginal, Eric. 2009. *The Language of Outsourced Call Centers: A Corpus-Based Study of Cross-Cultural Interaction*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Forey, Gail and Jane Lockwood (eds). 2010. *Globalisation, Communication and the Workplace*. London: Continuum.
- Forey, Gail. 2013. The impact of call centre employment on women in India. *World Englishes* 32(4): 503 – 520.
- Haugh, Michael. 2014. *(Im)politeness Implicatures*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Heller, Monica. 2007. Gender and bilingualism in the new economy. In Bonnie S. McElhinny (ed.) *Words, Worlds, and Material Girls. Language, Gender, Globalization*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 287-304.
- Heller, Monica. 2010. The commodification of language. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39: 101-14.
- Hernández-López, María and Lucía Fernández-Amaya. 2015. *A Multidisciplinary Approach to Service Encounters*. Leiden: Brill.

- Holman, David, Rosemary Batt and Ursula Holtgrewe. 2007. *The Global Call Center Report: International Perspectives on Management and Employment* [electronic version]. Ithaca, NY: Authors.
- Hultgren, Anna Kristina. 2008. *Linguistic Regulation and Interactional Reality: A Sociolinguistic Study of Call Centre Service Transactions*. DPhil thesis, University of Oxford.
- Hultgren, Anna Kristina. 2011. 'Building rapport' with customers across the world: The global diffusion of a call centre speech style. *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 15(1): 36–64.
- Kahlin, Linda and Ingela Tykesson. 2016. Identity attribution and resistance among Swedish-speaking call centre workers in Moldova. *Discourse Studies* 18(1): 87-105.
- Korczynski, Marek. 2001. The contradictions of service work: Call centre as customer-oriented bureaucracy. In Andrew Sturdy, Irena Grugulis and Hugh Willmott (eds.) *Customer Service: Empowerment and Entrapment*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 79-101.
- Lakoff, Robin. 2005. Civility and its discontents: or getting in your face. In Robin T. Lakoff and Sachiko Ide (eds.) *Broadening the Horizon of Linguistic Politeness*. Amsterdam: Benjamins. 23–43.
- Locher, Miriam A. and Sage L. Graham. 2010. Introduction to Interpersonal Pragmatics. In Miriam A. Locher & Sage L. Graham (eds.) *Interpersonal Pragmatics*. Berlin: Mouton. 1-13.
- Márquez Reiter, Rosina. 2011. *Mediated Business Interactions: Intercultural Communication Between Speakers of Spanish*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Merritt, Marilyn. 1976. On question following questions in service encounters. *Language in Society* 5 315-357.

Mills, Sara. 2003. *Gender and Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Miozzo, Marcela and Matias Ramirez. 2003. Services innovation and the transformation of work: The case of UK telecommunications. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 18(1): 62-79.

Mirchandani, Kiran. 2005. Gender Eclipsed? Racial Hierarchies in Transnational Call Center Work. *Social Justice* 32(4): 105 – 119.

Ogiermann, Eva and Małgorzata Suszczyńska. 2011. On im/politeness behind the iron curtain. In Francesca Bargiela-Chiappini and Dániel Z. Kádár (eds.) *Politeness Across Cultures*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 194-215.

Rathmayr, Renate. 2008. Intercultural aspects of new Russian politeness. *WU Online Papers in International Business Communication*. Series One 4. Department für Fremdsprachliche Wirtschaftskommunikation, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business, Vienna. <http://epub.wu.ac.at/1060/1/document.pdf> (accessed 24 March 2016).

Ritzer, George. 2013. *The McDonaldization of Society* [20th anniversary edition]. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Salonga, Aileen. 2010. *Language and situated agency: An exploration of the dominant linguistic and communication practices in the Philippine offshore call centers*. PhD thesis, National University of Singapore.

- Sifianou, Maria. 2013. The impact of globalisation on politeness and impoliteness. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 55: 86-102.
- Spencer-Oatey, Helen. 2008. *Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory* [second edition]. London: Continuum.
- Taylor, Phil, Jeff Hyman, Gareth Mulvey and Peter Bain. 2002. Work organization, control, and the experience of work in call centres. *Work, Employment and Society* 16(1): 133-150.
- Terkourafi, Marina. 2008. Towards a unified theory of politeness, impoliteness, and rudeness. In Derek Bousfield and Miriam A. Locher (eds.) *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on Its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 45–74.
- Ventola, Eija. 1987. *The Structure of Social Interaction: A Systemic Approach to the Semiotics of Service Encounters*. London: Frances Pinter.
- Watts, Richard J. 2003. *Politeness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Woydack, Johanna and Ben Rampton. 2015. Text trajectories in a multilingual call centre: The linguistic ethnography of a calling script. *Tilburg Papers in Culture Studies* 124: 1-24.

TABLES

Table 1: Balance between prescribed transactional and interactional talk

Number	Rule	Elaboration
Transactional rules		
1.	Greeting	
2.	Acknowledgement	‘Verbal nods made when customer explains their initial reason for calling or reiterates what the customer has said, e.g. “Right”, “I see”, “OK”, “That’s fine”, “Right, so you are looking for a balance today”’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
3.	Signposting	‘Advises the customer what they are going to do, e.g. “Firstly, I need to look at your details Mr./Mrs. Customer...”, “I’ll need to get the account for you...”’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
4.	Transfer notification	
5.	Hold notification	

Number	Rule	Elaboration
6.	Summary before solution	‘Summarizes own understanding of situation to ensure everything is correct before offering a solution’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
7.	Questions	‘Questions to find out relevant details about the situation, e.g. “Who is the policy owner, Mrs....”, “What information are you looking for today?”’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
8.	Offer alternatives	‘As part of solution, provides alternatives for the customer whenever possible, e.g. “I can give you that information now or put it in writing to you Mr...”’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
9.	Check understanding	‘Checks customer accepts the solution or now understands the action they/the adviser will take, e.g. “Does that make sense now Mr/Mrs Customer?”, “Would you like me to go over those details again for you?”’ (Customer service manual, Thistle).
10.	Timescale	‘Where any correspondence is being issued/callback required always give caller a timescale in hours (for callbacks and working days for correspondence being issued’ (Call assessment scorecard, Thistle, emphasis in original).

Number	Rule	Elaboration
11.	Summary	'Summarize any action to be taken and check if anything else is required' (Call assessment scorecard, Thistle).
	Interactional rules	
12.	Verbal handshake	'Ask the customer for their name at the first opportunity, e.g. "You're speaking to X", "May I first take your name"' (Customer service manual, Thistle).
13.	Name	'Ask for the caller's name and use it' (Customer service manual, Thistle).
14.	Small talk	'Proactively builds on common ground or opportunities to build rapport, e.g. "A new baby and a new house... that must be hard work"' (Customer service manual, Thistle).
15.	Empathy	'Uses words that demonstrate empathy and understanding where appropriate, e.g. "I understand that must be really frustrating for you", "I'm sorry you've had that experience"' (Customer service manual, Thistle).

Number	Rule	Elaboration
16.	Thanks/please	
17.	Active listening	'Verbally nods during customer explanations, e.g. "Urgh huh...", "Right...", "OK...", "I see"' (Customer service manual, Thistle).
18.	Anything else	'Asks the customer if you can help with anything else, e.g. "Is there anything else I can help you with today, Mr./Mrs. Customer?"' (Customer service manual, Thistle).
19.	Welcome to call back	
20.	Thanks for calling	
21.	Personal endnote	'Add a personal note, e.g. "I do hope you enjoy your holiday, party, son's wedding, etc."' (Customer service manual, Thistle).

FIGURES



Figure 1: Potential and actual compliance for interactional prescriptions: unmarked and marked